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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

October 20, 2005

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ROBERT L. SIMMONS, STAFF DIRECTOR

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The recent constitutional referendum, where Iraqis were able to cast their vote in the absence of large-scale violence, is an important milestone for the Iraqi people. I commend our forces for the role they played in helping to secure that vote.

I strongly believe that we share the goal of an Iraq able to provide for its own security. At the same time, both the American and the Iraqi people must have a clear sense of progress, given that the challenges to Iraqi security remain substantial. Iraqi security forces must be able to take the fight to the insurgents on their own and to inspire the confidence of the Iraqi people. Similarly, the American public must see that there is a connection between increasing capability of Iraqi security forces and a diminishing American commitment over time.

The latest quarterly report from the Department of Defense on "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq" talks about the "criteria for withdrawing forces." While it discusses the considerations that will be taken into account in any redeployment and talks about "when conditions permit handing over security responsibilities," it is not specific nor does it give any measurement that the Iraqi or American people can use to see progress toward redeployment over time. If we expect the American people to continue to support continued deployments in Iraq, we should be able to explain the connection between the improvement in Iraqi capability and the reduced need for U.S. forces in Iraq over time more clearly.


I believe that we should set a benchmark that is easy to understand and that sets reasonable, achievable standards for both our forces and the Iraqis. In terms of units, because a brigade is the smallest military unit able to support itself and fight independently, brigades should be the standard sized units used to measure Iraqi security force capability over time. Additionally, in terms of readiness standards, units rated at "Level 1" indicate that they have the capability to plan and fight independently, without any assistance from U.S. forces. Therefore, I propose the following formula: that for

every three Iraqi security force combat brigades rated "Level 1" – or fully capable - an American brigade or unit of similar size, type, and mission should be strategically redeployed from Iraq.

In addition to setting a clear benchmark, we need to apply even more resources toward the training of Iraqi security forces to accelerate the effort. If more advisory teams would do the job faster, we should add them. All of these advisory units should be staffed and equipped with our very best officers. Instead of staffing them in an ad-hoc manner, we should take those selected for command of U.S. units and assign them to advisory billets. These are the officers the Services have determined to be their very best. Furthermore, we should make every effort to name next year's advisors today and get them in advisor and language schools now. We must make a combat advisor tour a highly career enhancing tour in the military.

Mr. President, I realize there are a variety of reasonable ways to look at benchmarks for strategic redeployment, but I think any of them must clearly link to the development of Iraqi Security Force capability to the redeployment of American forces in a way that both the American and the Iraqi people can plainly see. That is why I think my method of matching the redeployment of an American brigade for every three Iraq brigades that reach Level 1 readiness has particular merit.

I stand ready to assist in this critical effort and share your pride in all that our fine troops have done in Iraq and around the world.

Sincerely,

Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat

cc: Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld